

Famous Artists Course for Talented Young People
Famous Artists Schools, Inc., Westport, Connecticut

Section 15 Exploration—
advanced picture-making

Guilding Faculty

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[1904-1965]

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ex·plore (iks-plôr', i
explorare, to search
investigate; examine
to learn about its na

Explore

From now on, we want you to think of yourself less as a student, more as a real artist. In the last months you've been mastering the fundamentals you need in order to find and express yourself. Now you're going to take all you've learned and use it to explore, seek and discover. You're going to reach further than you ever have before.

Some of the experiments on the next pages may look like play to you, but they're really not. Exploring in art is fun, and of course we hope you'll enjoy the projects ahead. But if you really work at them they'll open for you a big fund of knowledge, too, and show you a whole array of findings and solutions to store away for future problem solving.

All artists, even the great ones, come up against problems once in a while. In creating a piece of art, they may reach a frustrating point where they don't really like what they've done, but don't quite know why. When that happens they turn to their own store of solutions, gained through the very methods of exploration and searching we want you to try.

There's another asset to be gained from this kind of ex-

ploration. It will introduce you to different approaches, and thus keep you from becoming locked into a single style of drawing or painting. By now you may be doing one kind of picture quite well. You may have developed a nice clean line, or a good feeling for design or color composition. You may handle values beautifully. You may like your own way of working very much, but even so, you should force yourself out of familiar patterns to try other methods and techniques. How else can you learn and grow?

This section, then, is designed to open you, free you and extend your artistic range. You'll experiment with four familiar elements in picture-making — line, shape, value and texture. While we take them one at a time, it's really impossible to separate them. You just can't have one without the others. A line is the border of shape, shape is contained by line. Value gives dimension and depth to shape, texture describes its surface. No matter what kind of work you do — sculpture, design, abstraction, representational painting — these four interrelated elements will always be present.



One idea builds on another

For now, it doesn't matter what kind of artistic work you'll do later on. Just experiment freely, *not with the idea of creating finished pictures*, but to find ways of working through problems. It isn't always necessary to have a pre-

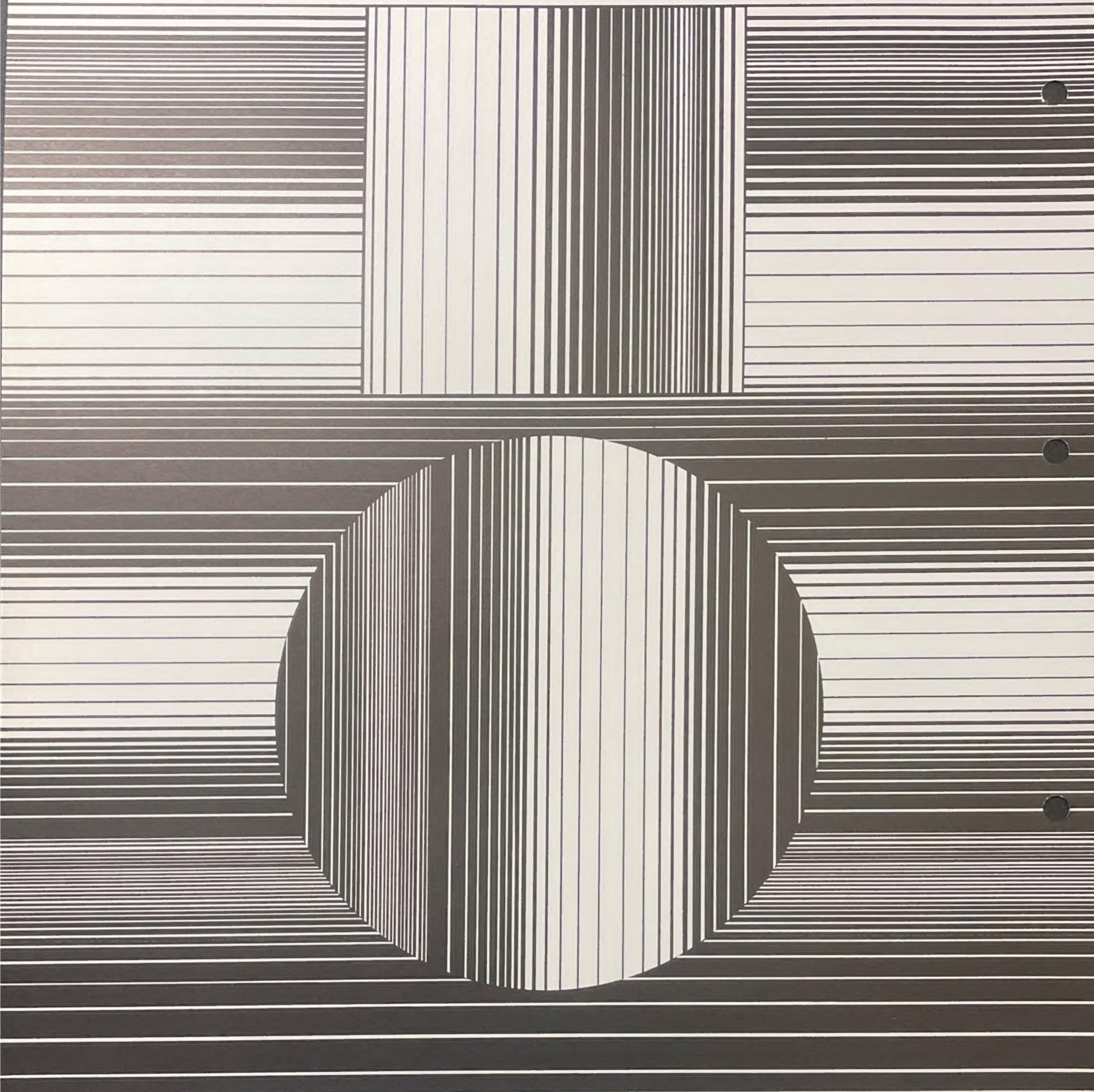
conceived idea, when you begin, of what your finished work will look like. Many times pictures take shape through exploration. Each step you reach suggests something else; one idea builds on another, as long as you keep the process, and



your thinking, open and creative.

Study the next pages thoughtfully, read your instructions with care and work out the projects very conscientiously. You'll see that they ask much more of you than projects of

the past—more of your mind and heart and skills, more commitment to the idea, the belief, that you are ready to be an artist now. That's what we believe, but you must have the courage and the will to make it so.



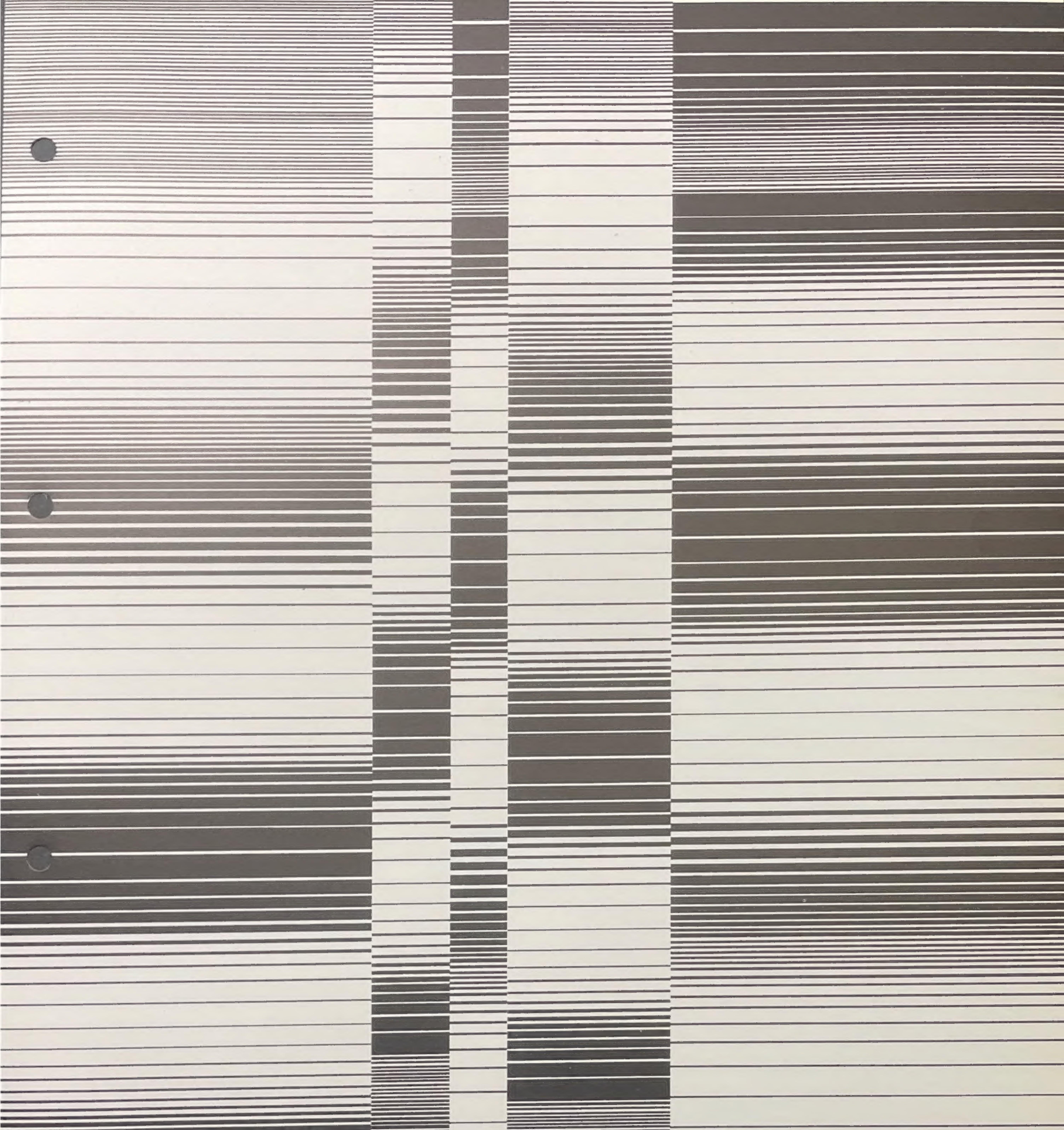
Line

Lines affect each other. If you manipulate them, together they can create remarkable impressions and patterns and images. Stop to study the lines on these pages. You'll find many values and shapes and the illusion of depth, too—all the way from a very shallow dimension to one that reaches far, far back into space.

Notice, first of all, the many different tones you can create

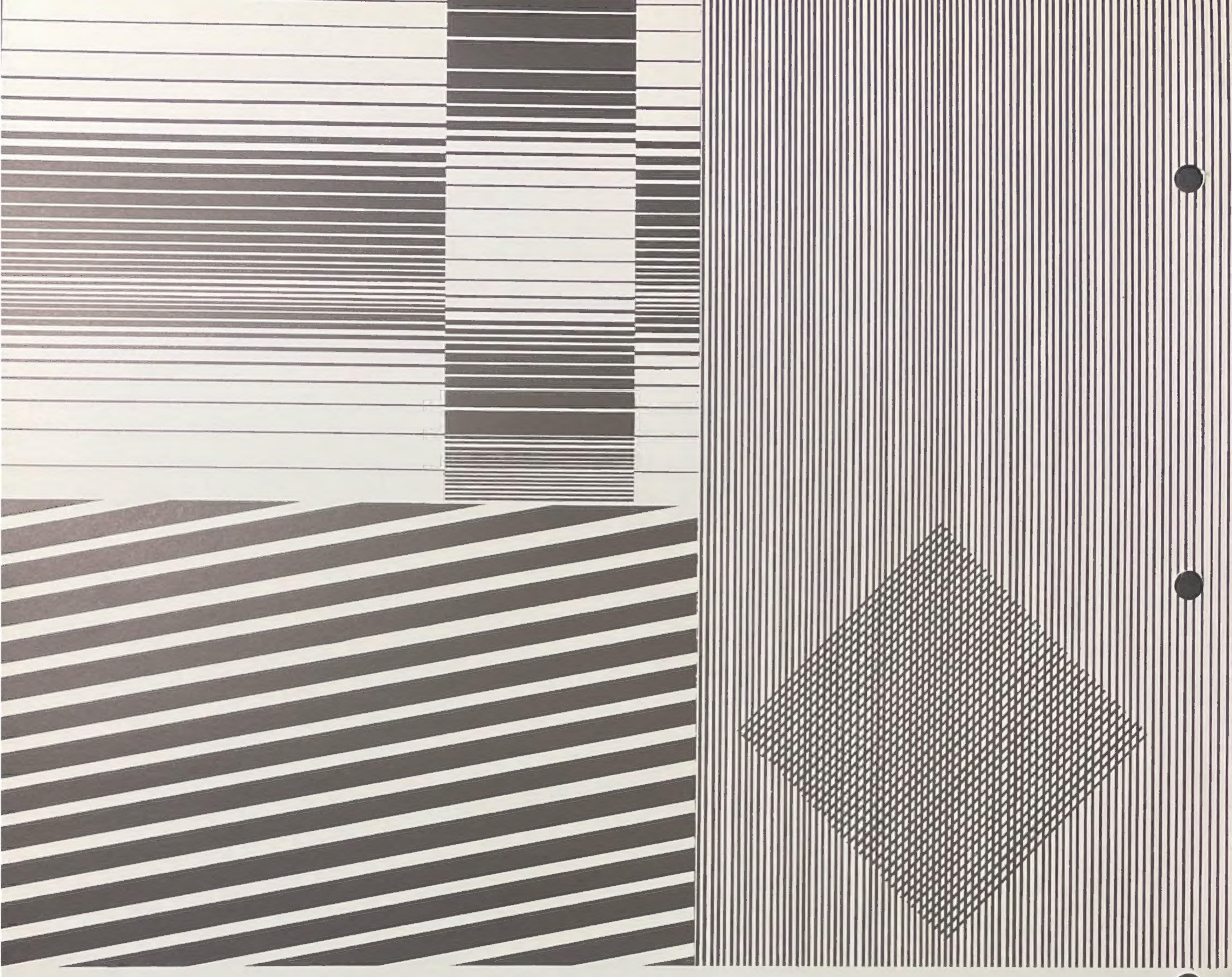
with line, from deep black to the palest gray. The best way to see these value variations is to set your book upright and then step back and look at it from across the room. From a distance, the black lines soften and merge with the white ones to create tone. Can you see where the pattern shifts from black lines on white ground to white on black?

What about shapes? There are lots of line-created shapes



here. The circle and square on the facing page hold your eye at first. Now look at the vertical shapes created by line above and note the feeling of depth they generate. Which ones recede, which come forward? Are you sure? Look again. Actually, your eye can set up a shifting relationship here, so that each shape seems to first recede and then move in front of the others — or the other way around.

You'll find that much more is going on here if you look at these pages for a while. You'll discover other less obvious instances of spatial illusion. You'll find other shapes, beginning with the shape of the whole design, and ending, perhaps, with the tiniest shape within it. Keep looking, try to think of ways you might adapt these properties to your work. There's almost no end to the magical power of line.

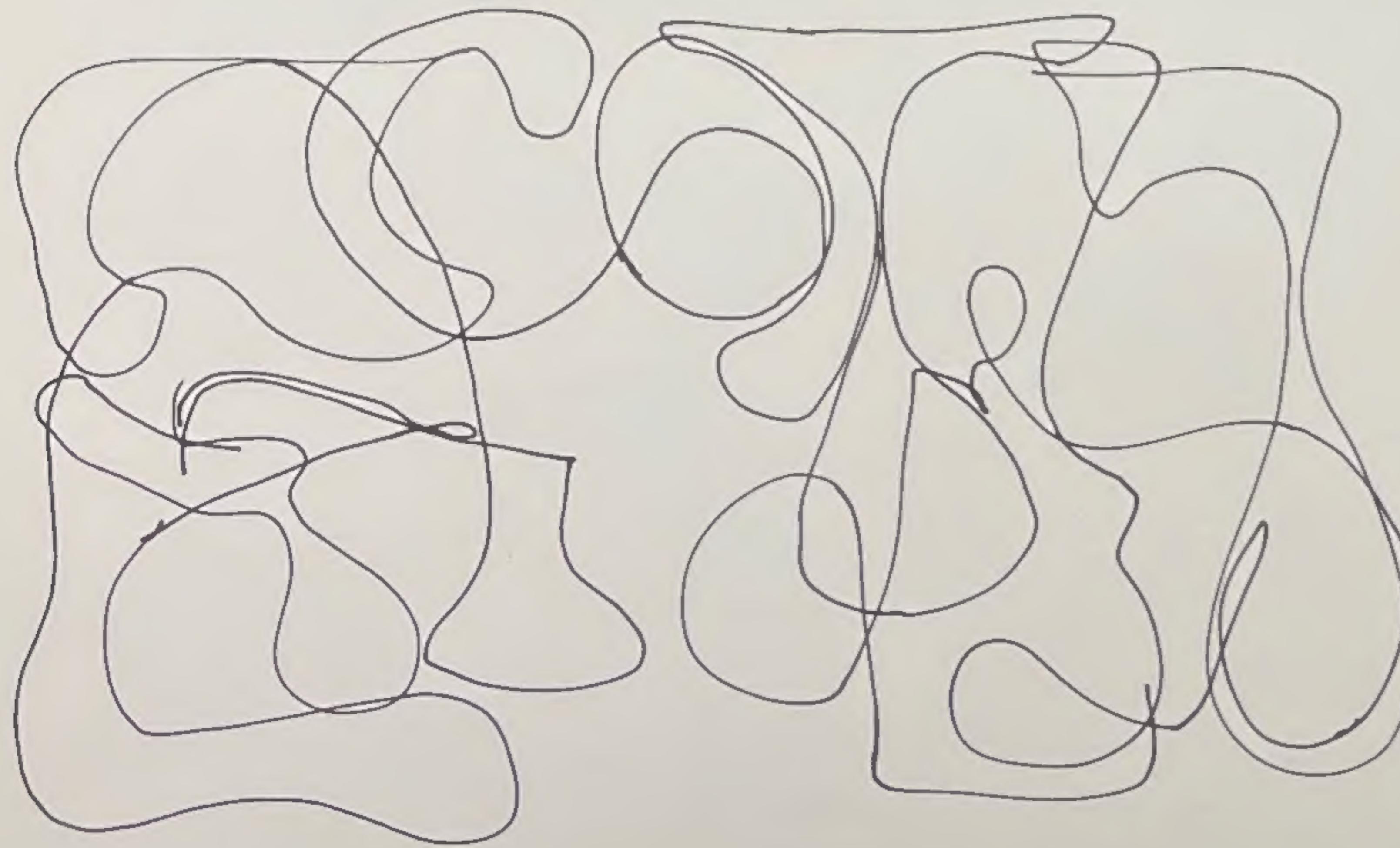


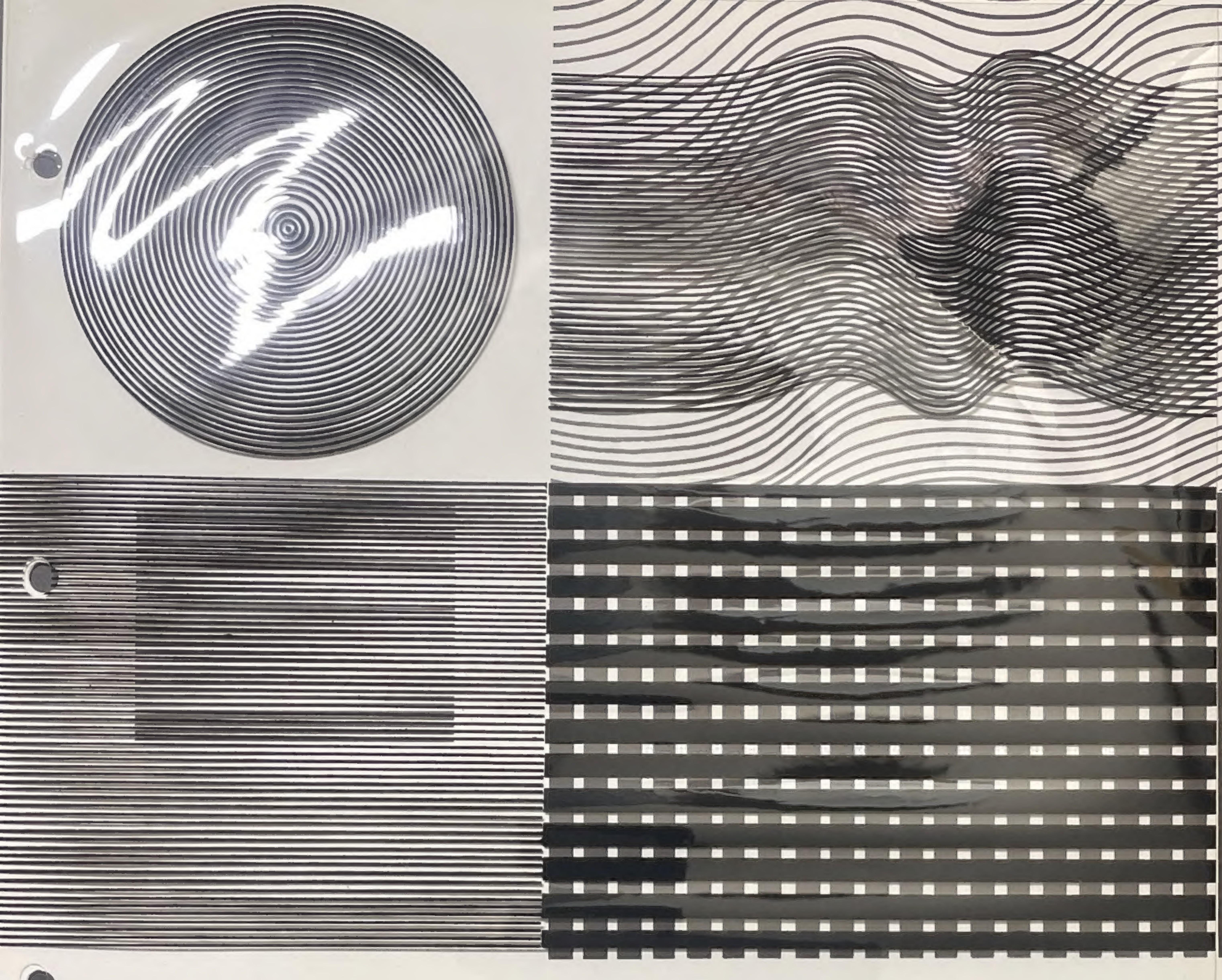
Experiment with line

At first glance these pages may look like a hodgepodge of aimless marks and scribbles, but actually they've been carefully worked out to provide you with a rich supply of raw materials for exploring line.

What happens when you put lines together? You get shape, pattern, texture, value—you can also set up vibrations and movement. By the simple act of laying one line arrangement over another, you'll be taking two visual designs and creating something else with a much different look and feeling. This is one way that ideas develop and build from each other. Let ideas come to you. Even if some of the insights you gain from your experiments here seem out of context with the work you're doing now, they'll be suddenly applicable someday, in the most unexpected way.

Place the acetate sheet evenly over page 9, then page 8, noting what happens when you combine these patterns of line. See the grids, the wavy patterns you suddenly create? Jiggle the acetate sheet to observe how the moving lines affect the static ones beneath. Remove the overlay from the





binder and move it even more freely over the two pages. Notice how the lines interact as the overlay passes across, up and down, around. Turn it upside down and sideways, too.

Now note the haphazard, wandering line at bottom left. Here the artist found in a doodle the beginning of a picture. He started by filling in some of the shapes he saw in his meandering line, letting his imagination play over the whole design as he did so. Pretty soon he began to find a suggestion of music here. He first saw some of the white shapes as musical notes. Then he found a trumpeter, and a man playing a guitar. Seizing on that idea he developed (on another overlay) the sketch at right—the result of an open, willing exploration with line.

Try this experiment yourself. Draw an aimless line first, then use a transparent overlay—tracing paper works fine—for each successive step. You'll experience the fun, the real excitement of discovering and building one idea from another as you go along. And don't get discouraged if your line fails to trip your imagination. Just start over again.





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Now explore a scene you know

This time you're going to start with a subject that's familiar to you and use it as the take-off point for some explorations in line, shape and tone. First, make a quick on-the-spot ink sketch of a corner scene you know very well. Keep your drawing big and open; swing in the main areas and elements with loose, free lines. Don't clutter your sketch with tight little detail. This shouldn't be a finished drawing in any sense.

As you work, be aware of the movement, the gesture and rhythm of your scene and try to capture them with your pen. When you've finished, take your drawing home and keep it to use as reference for your explorations.

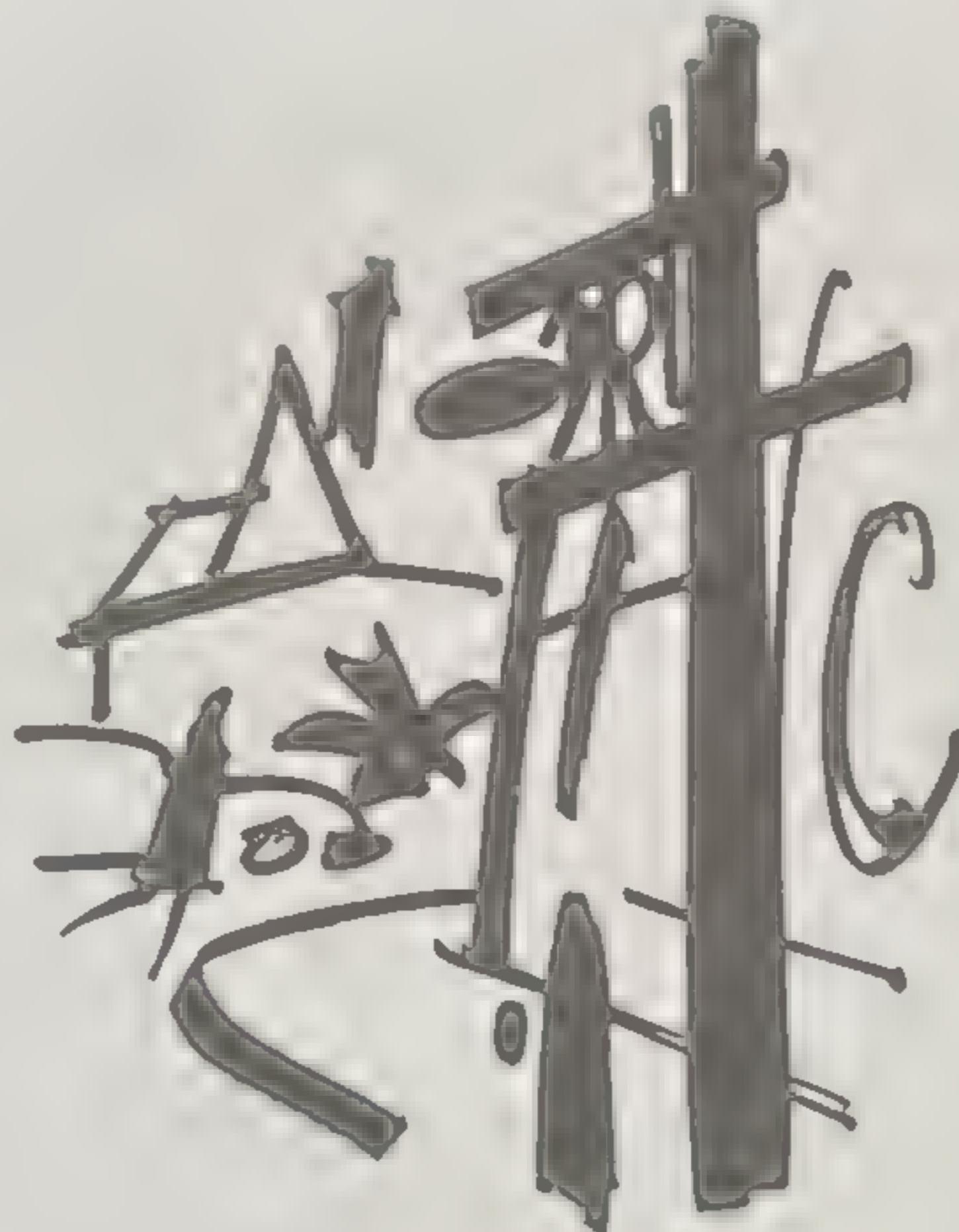
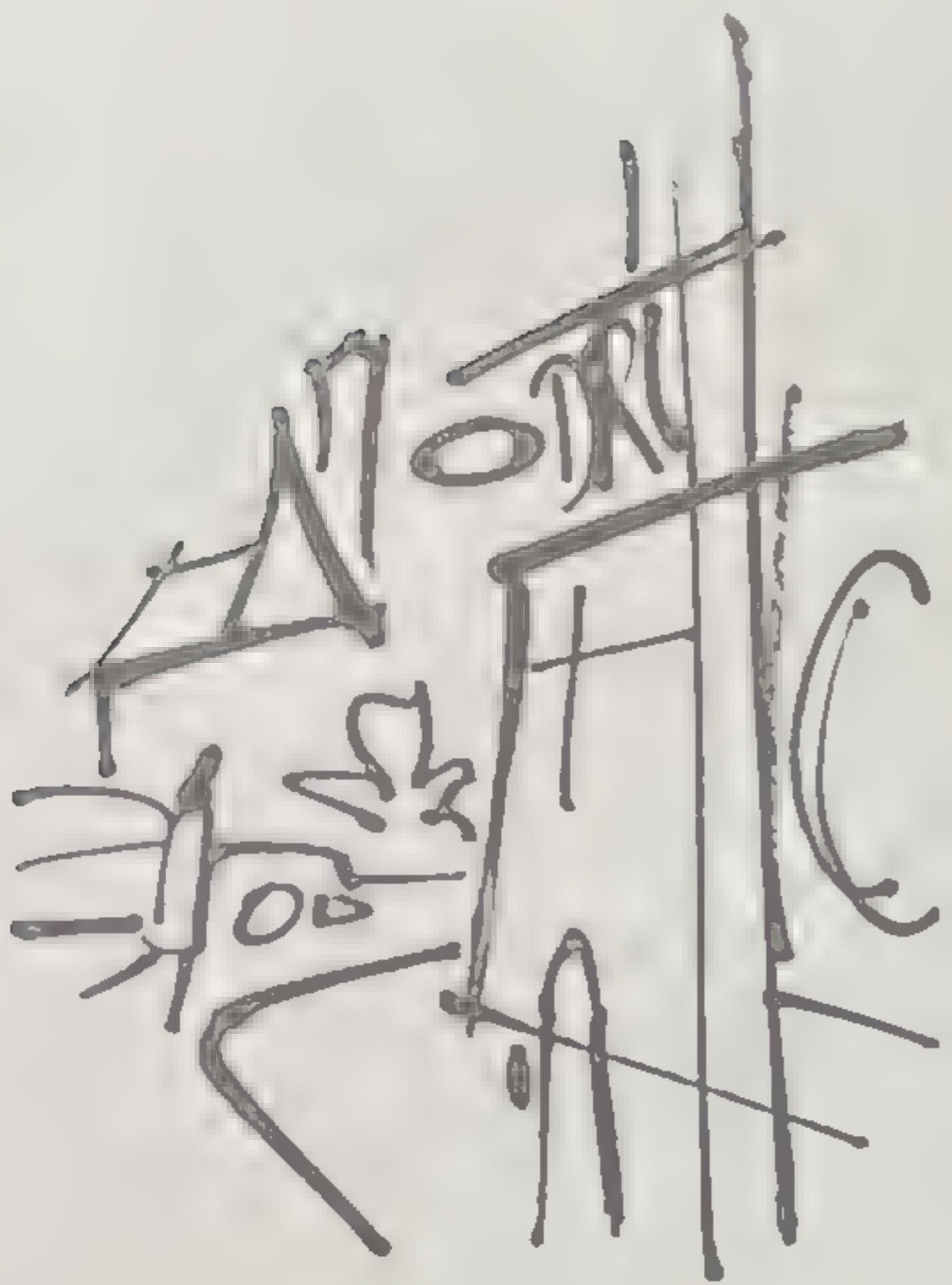
The sketches on the facing page should give you an idea of the kind of exploring to do. There are three kinds of experiments here, but you've explored enough by now to know that the possibilities of any subject go on and on, so don't limit yourself to these. Let yourself take a certain direction, and follow wherever it leads you. After that, try another direction, then a third and fourth.

Exploring just this one drawing in depth will extend your understanding of the many ways you can approach a single artistic idea. It may extend your understanding of yourself, too, and help you find a way of working which is most compatible to you, most expressive of your responses to the subject you want to put on paper or canvas.

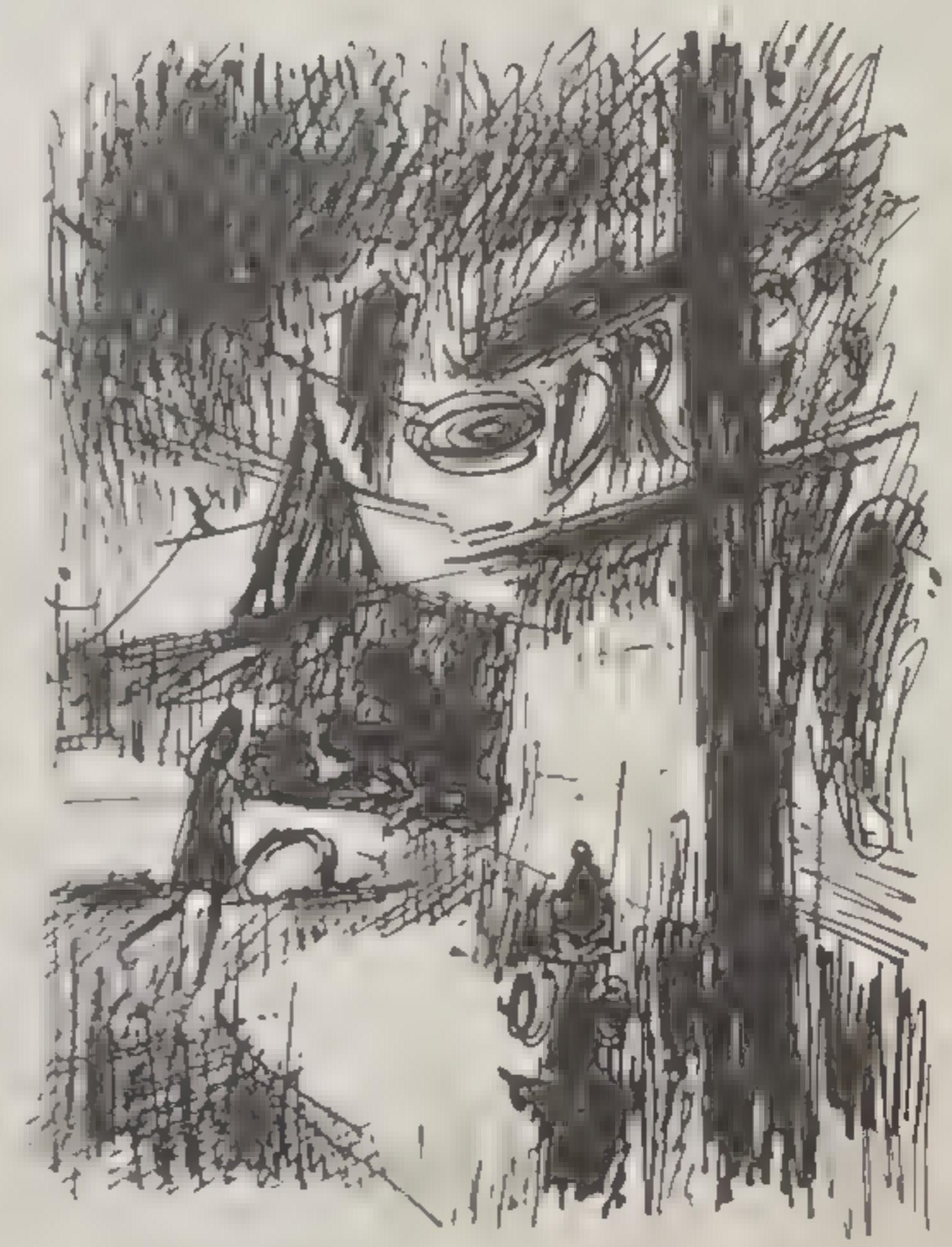
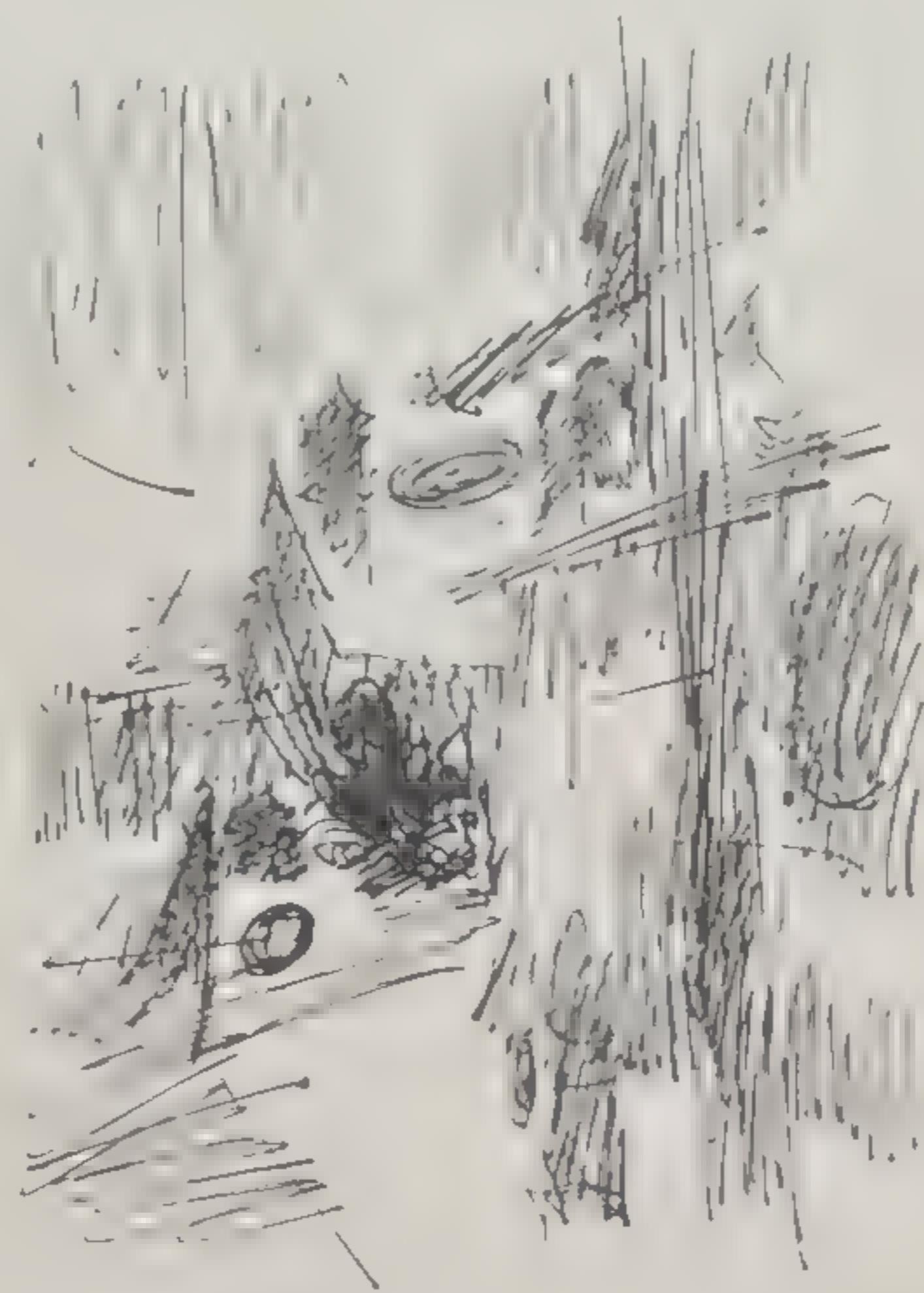
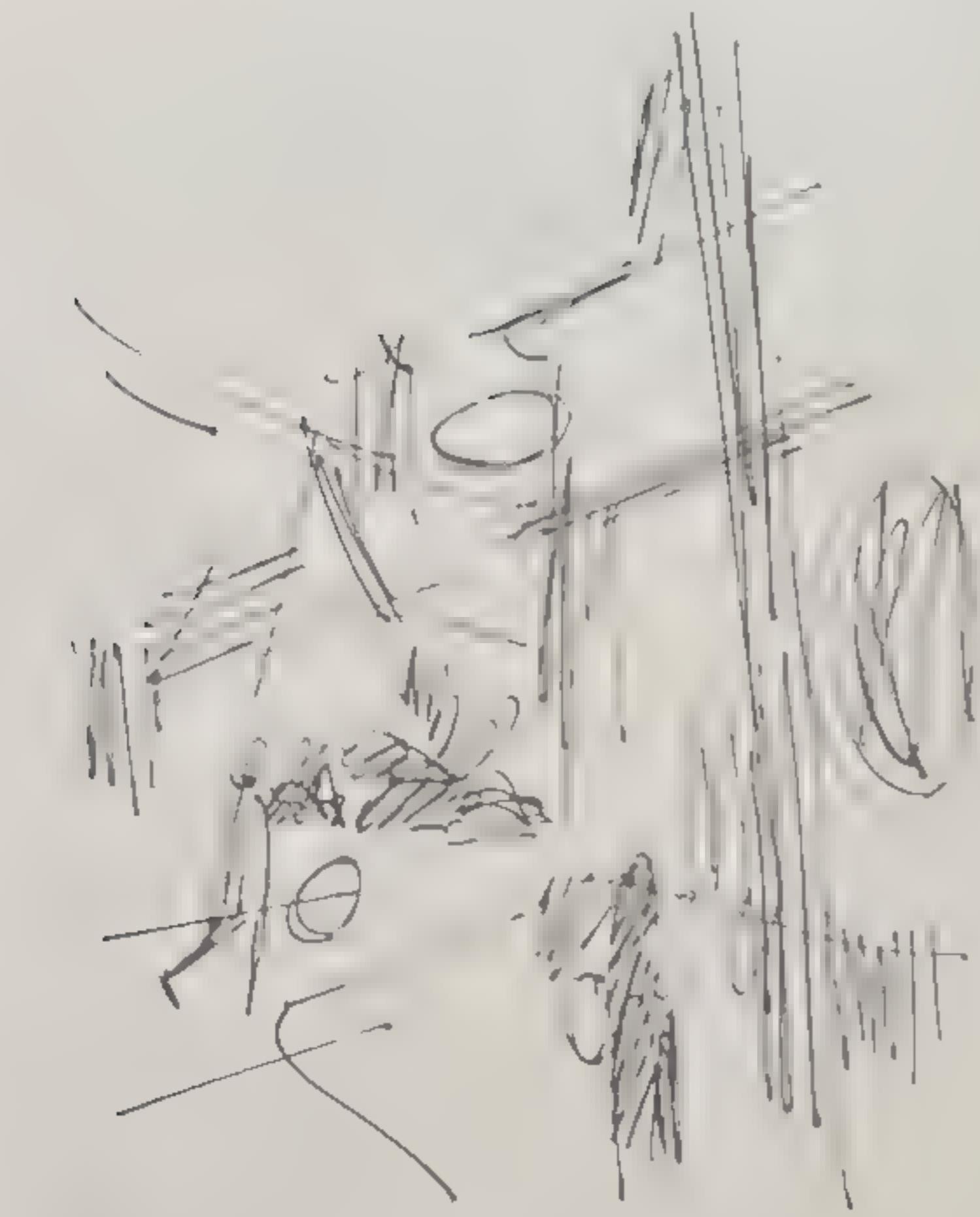




First try breaking up the lines in your sketch. You can use tracing paper if you want to. Take two or three steps for this, laying new paper over each sketch in turn, fragmenting the lines a little more each time. If sometime you see a particular quality of flickering sunlight in a scene you're drawing, you might choose a broken line to suggest in your picture the same shifting, elusive effect.



Now try a direction that leads from line to shape. Rather than interrupting the lines, as you did above, add to them, building them up and combining them until you arrive at a bold, pleasing shape design. The weighty arrangement at right no longer resembles the drawing on the opposite page, even though it began with that sketch. Do you see that by taking a different direction, you can arrive at something that's completely different in feeling?



This time build up tones — contrasting tones and subtly varying ones — with short crosshatched lines. Even though some of the areas in the final sketch above are quite dark, they're all drawn with this kind of line. Just superimpose line on line again and again until you arrive at the value you're after. Sometimes you may be inspired by the tonal effect of your subject. This is one way you could capture that quality on paper.

Shape

A successful piece of art is nearly always based on a solid structure of shapes. You learned that first in Section 4, and before you begin to explore with shape now you might want to go back to pages 4 and 5 of that section to refresh your memory about this very important fact in picture-making.

How do you see the big white shapes here? As abstract parts of a bold design or as the letters *E* and *T*? Read them either way, it doesn't matter as far as their role here is concerned. Even though they are letters, they are, like the black areas around them, shapes—first of all. What feeling do you get from this arrangement in black and white? Does it seem architectural to you? Stately? Strong?


On the next few pages you're going to work with shapes. You'll see that you can get all kinds of different feelings through the shapes you use, and that sometimes, by the slightest alteration, you can effect a dramatic change in a picture



Here's a design based on the same proportion of black to white as the graphic arrangement on the preceding pages. It's just as strong in impact, too. Yet, because of the change in shapes, the *feeling* is different here. Many times it's the design of the shapes in a composition that creates a particular feeling or mood.

This time we have a subject that's immediately clear—a fisherman's wharf. This is a distinctive, recognizable shape. At the same time it's a number of separate white shapes which relate to the black shapes of the background to create an arrangement of darks and lights. Now what would happen if we kept the *same* size and shape relationships, but changed the values?






What was black on the previous pages is white on this one; what was white is now black. Isn't it remarkable that just this simple value reversal can alter the feeling so dramatically? Tuck this information away and remember it someday when you're baffled about what to do with a piece you're working on. Say you're painting a picture with a light sky and a dark forest and the whole thing looks boring and dead. The simple step of reversing values might work such a miraculous change it would bring your composition to life!









Now let's blow the whole thing apart. Using the black-on-white design of the preceding two pages, take all the white shapes and arrange them into an abstract design that's as far from the original as you can make it. This is a fine way of jarring yourself into seeing things differently, and sometimes that's what you need to do when a piece of work is going badly. It isn't likely that you'd get this far away from your initial idea in creating a single picture, but it can happen that even a slight change in the way you arrange the shapes will be just what you need.

You can go on from here with your own investigations of shape. See what happens when you add color to shape, or when you change its value. One idea will lead to the next and the next, if you just keep going.



Value

When a picture of yours is failing to look like what it's supposed to be in the way you've imagined your subject to be, it may be that darks may be too dark, your lights too light, or the overall value pattern itself may be too confused with choppy little patches of dark and light. Light is the stuff of painting. If you want to paint effectively, that's what you need. If you have a picture composed of lots of little areas of tone, your picture just won't look like what it's supposed to.

On these pages are two graded tones. The bottom one is a smooth transition from dark to light. The one at top is made up of lots of small shapes and lines. But they are arranged so that when you look at them from a distance they blend to create a tone just as firmly controlled, from dark to light, as the one below it.

Remember that the same thing happens in pictures — the eye mixes small areas of tone to create large value shapes. No matter how separate and detailed the elements in your painting may be, they are part of an overall value pattern. A group of trees, for example, should form one large value shape, even though there may be subtle tonal gradations within that shape, even though each tree may be clearly delineated and detailed.

Explore and keep on exploring value. See what happens when you alter the contrasts, subtleties and gradations of darks and lights; note the effect they have on each other. Even the slightest shift in tone may be enough to unify the value pattern and give breath to a dying composition.

Make a macro-drawing

Here are two enormously magnified drawings of small objects. The exquisitely delineated flower below is a bud of wildflower less than a quarter of an inch in diameter. The powerful, thrusting objects on the facing page are really little quarter-inch drills, drawn as they might look to a bug. The original drawings are about two feet high.

This kind of exaggeration, called macro-drawing, helps you look at things in an out-of-the-ordinary way. In drawing an object as it would look ten, twenty, even fifty times its real size, you blow up every line, every tonal variation and texture and, of course, the shape. Because it demands an eye that observes the smallest, subtlest detail, macro-drawing is a way to really sharpen your ability to see.

Using sheets of paper at least 15 by 20 inches, make two macro-drawings. Draw something small. It could be a pushpin or a pen nib, a screw or an earring. Vegetable and fruit cross-sections make interesting subjects, too. You'll find lots of things that would be intriguing to draw this way.

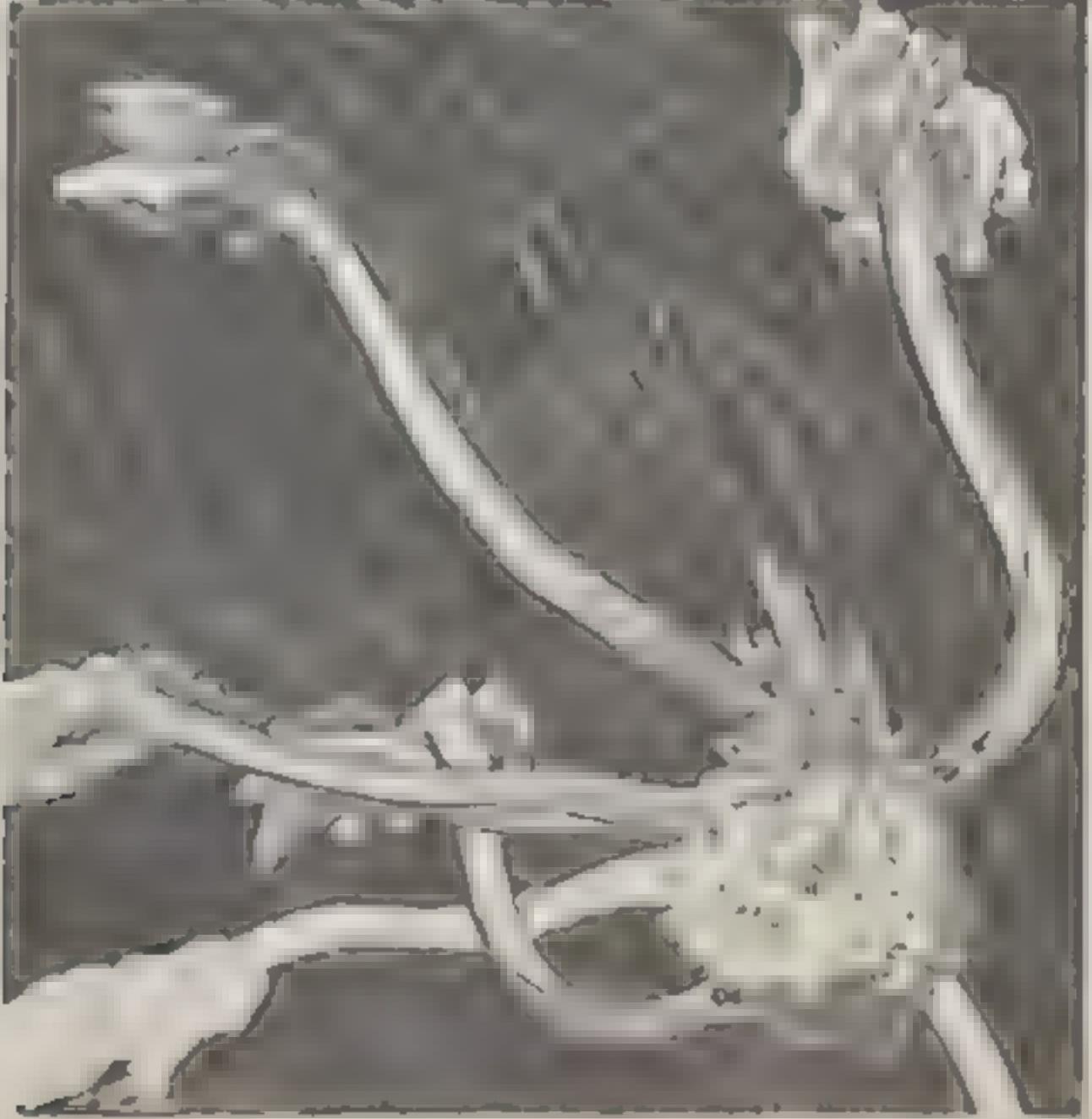
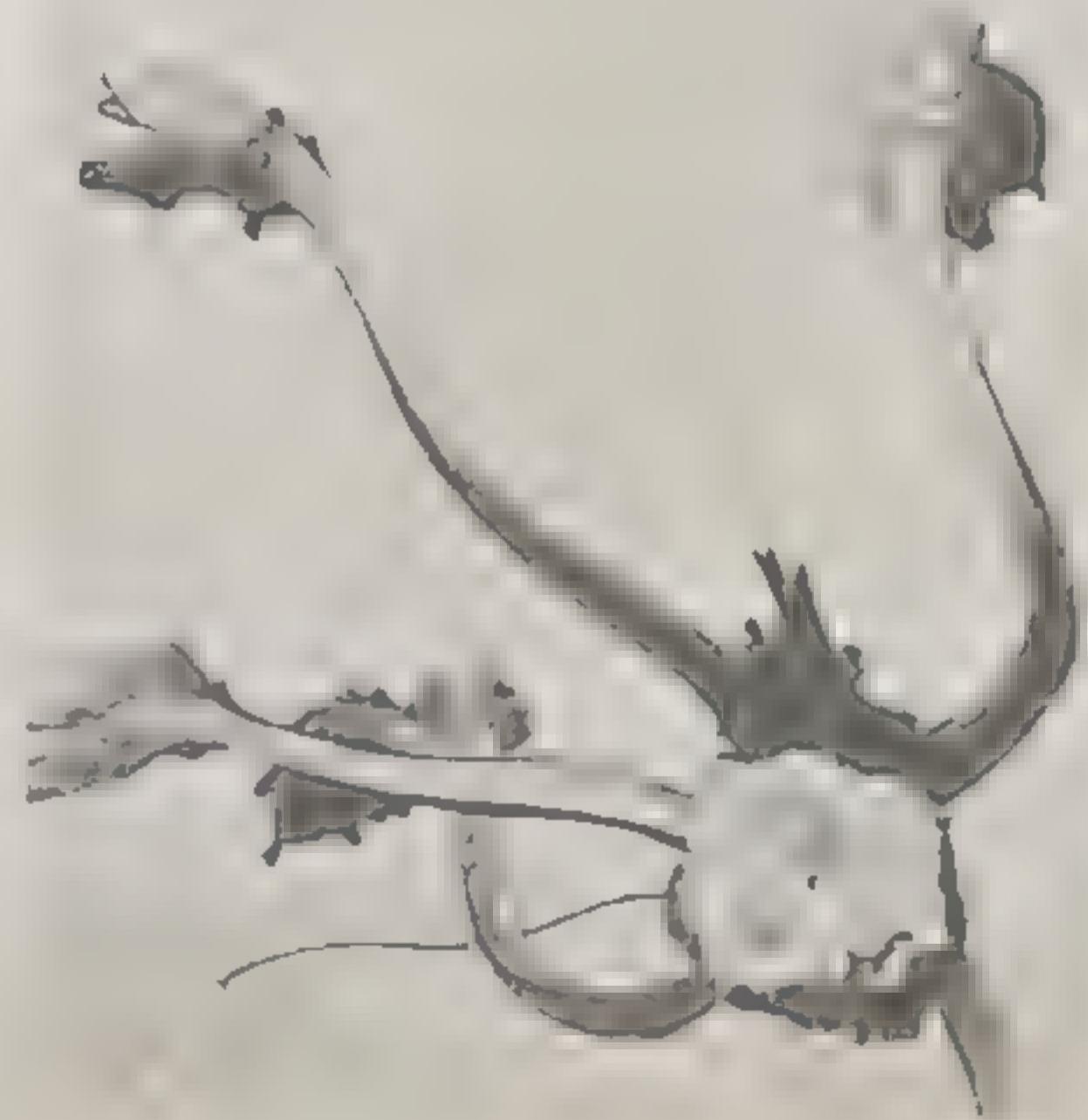
For your first drawing, use pencil on white paper and build your tones from light to dark. Use a medium gray ground for your second macro-drawing, as the student did at right. This time your medium will be charcoal. You can pick out some of your subtler shadings with a kneaded eraser.

Kyle Sherwood, 17

Explore value

Now, take one of your macro-drawings and try some tonal explorations to see what happens when you work out the values differently. Just to the right is a rather brittle treatment of tone. The darks are darker, the lights lighter than in the large rendering above. A much gentler value key gives a different feeling to the middle sketch. Here the tones are closely related, blending almost imperceptibly. At far right, the black background turns the atmosphere of this drawing almost inside out. This time it's heavy, dramatic and possibly a little sinister.

Experiment with values in your work. Never forget — they can be a powerful conveyor of feeling and mood.







Texture

Texture has always fascinated artists, but never as much as it does today, nor in the same way. Many contemporary artists use an interesting surface as a kickoff point—even as the sole content and subject of their work.

Look at the three versions of one section of tree bark, above. At left is a photograph, in the middle a rubbing, and at right a piece of work in which paint is used thickly and applied so that it actually has a tactile barklike quality.

Textural though they are, the rubbing and painting are meant to only simulate tree bark; the artists used the bark simply as a source of inspiration. There are some artists, though, who find more pleasure and artistic satisfaction in bringing actual textures into their work, just as you did in Section 3 when you made an assemblage out of your own collection of interesting textural objects. One artist, a very enthusiastic texture fan, insists that people who apply the



texture that inspired them, rather than drawing or painting it, are the "super realists" of our time.

Experiment with textures in every way you can think of. Start looking for textures, comparing them, enjoying them for their beauty and touch, for the way they catch the light or the way they enhance an otherwise ordinary scene. You'll be amazed at the richness of textures in the world. Just stand in a room or go outside — walk beside a stone wall, stand on

a crowded corner, go into a library or grocery store. Wherever you happen to be, if there is light, you'll see as many different textures as there are materials within your vision.

Paint textures. Draw them. Try some more textural assemblages. Learn to use the contrasts and similarities in the surfaces you find. As is true with every aspect of art, the more deeply you explore the world of texture, the more amazed you'll be with its endless possibilities.



Tree textures

Now let's go on to examine the tree. You can spend a lifetime with this one subject and never reach the bottom of the rich textural ideas it holds for the artist.

First back away and look at it whole. Its trunk and branches — dark lines and shapes against a light sky — create a visual texture.... There's another texture in a whole row of trees.

A single tree repeated over and over, as in a flat textile design, is a texture.

A forest, viewed from a watchtower, is a tracery of texture.

A web of bold tangled branches creates a strong, vibrant, textural shape.... Create a montage of photographs of trees and you get many textures that mingle to make an overall one.

An exploration of roots emerges as the texture of waves. Consider a tree stump. Concentric rings, rough bark and a delicate weed present an interesting contrast in textures.... A direct print from the inked wood suggests a field of wheat.

Stand directly over the stump and you see texture in the recorded life of a tree. Try following in pen the lines of bark, and the rough texture turns to filigree. A leaf is fragile.... What is the texture of its skeleton?

There it is. One small set of possibilities out of dozens and dozens more that you can discover with your eyes and pen and imagination. Explore the tree — explore in the same way any subject in the world that interests you.

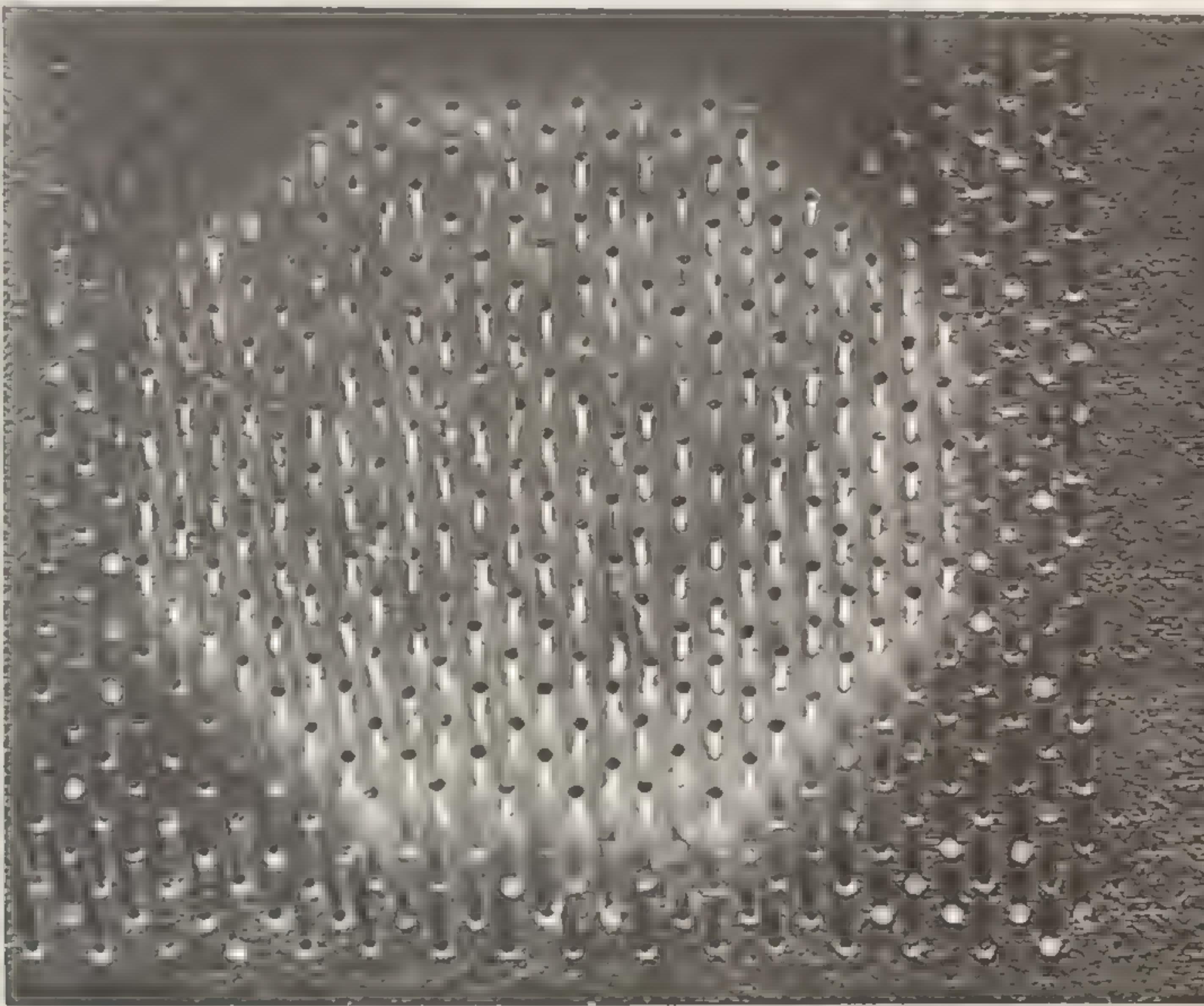
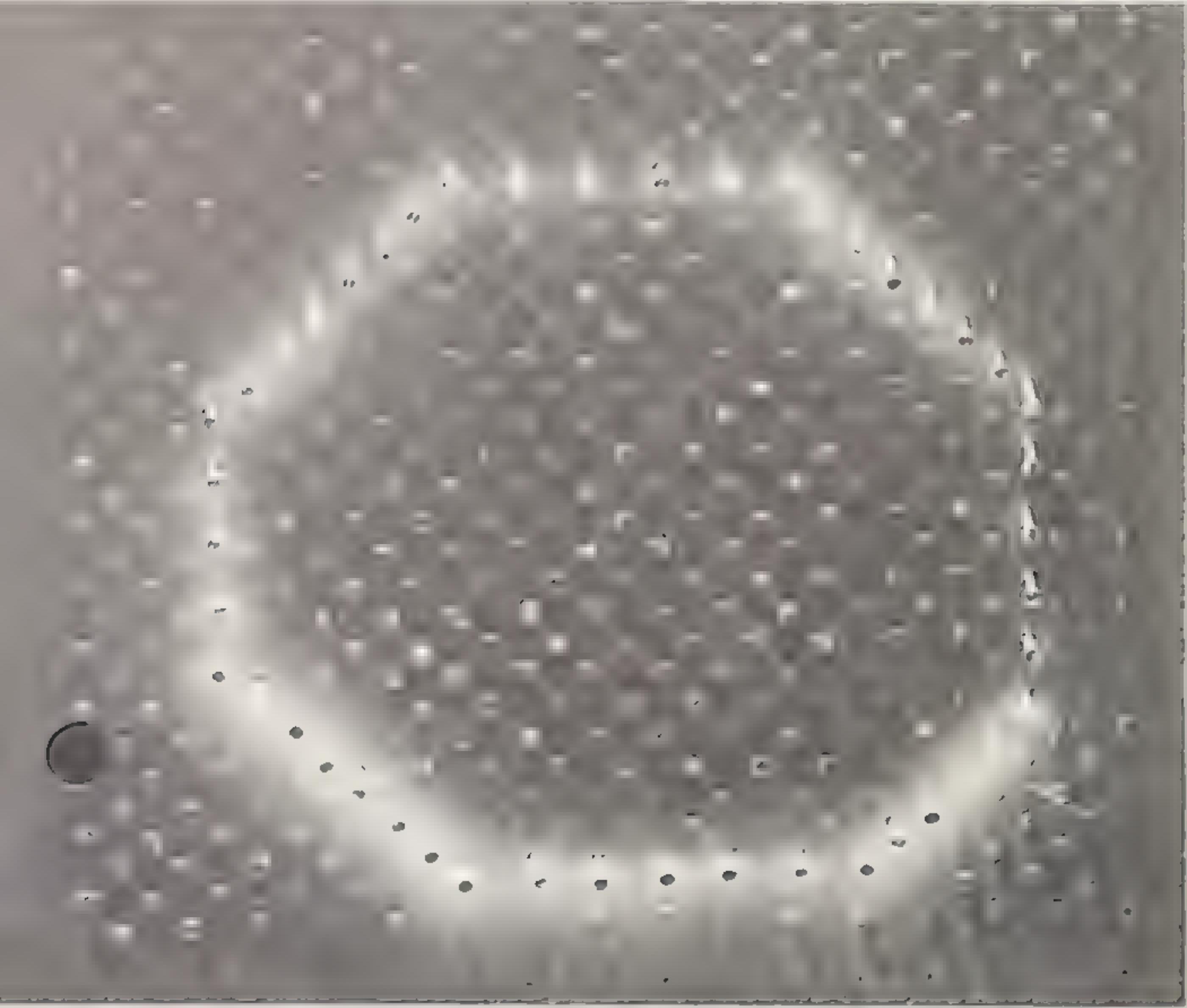
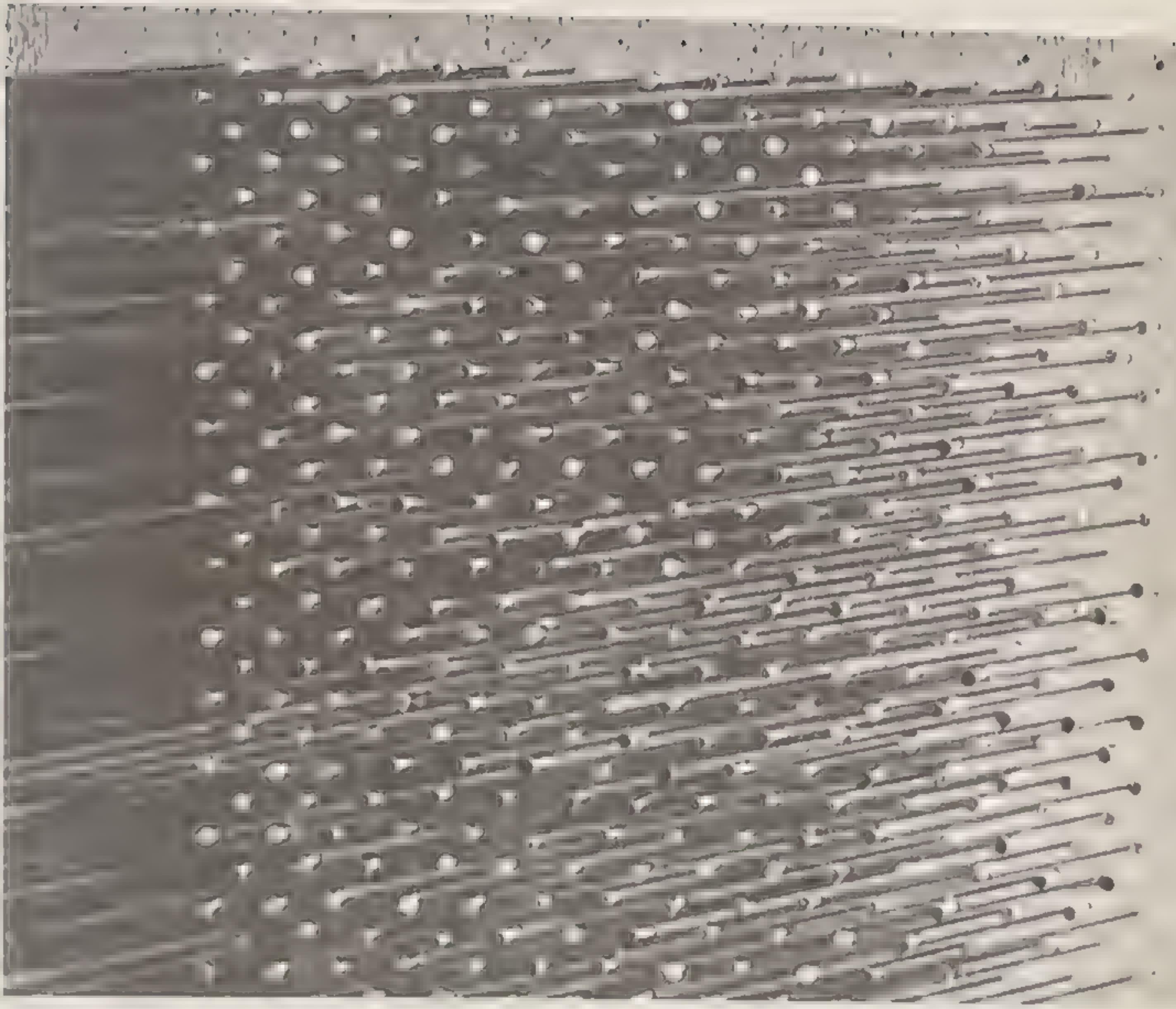
Light and texture

For any work of art with a strong surface appeal, light, like paint, is an artist's tool—and just as important. Here's an experiment designed to deepen your awareness of light as a medium in creating, enhancing and varying texture. It's simple to make—you need a piece of soft wallboard, lots of little nails, white or light gray spray paint and a flashlight or lamp.

Using a ruler, outline a rectangular checkerboard pattern on the wallboard. Make holes at each intersection of lines with a sharp instrument about the size of a compass point. Then partly insert a nail into each hole. You should be able to push it in and raise it easily. When the nails are in place, cover the whole design with spray paint.

Now you're ready to see what you can effect with texture and light. We've demonstrated two very simple ideas, creating first line, then shape, by the way we manipulated the nails, then cast the light on them from an angle. The first design, as you can see, comes from pushing in all the nails except those in the line. To make the shape, we pushed up all the nails inside the octagonal outline. In your own experiments, as you vary the heights of the nails, keep altering the angles and directions of light, too.

With such everyday materials as these you can get effects that are quite unusual, even beautiful, when you know how to handle the magic tool of light. Carry this knowledge over into your own work with texture.



Here's a piece of whimsy in three dimensions, made from a flat board and a bunch of drawer pulls. There are a number of textures—in the gay patterns of each pull, in the arrangement of the whole design, in the background. Notice how the work gains depth and interest by dramatic shadows, cast by a carefully placed source of light. The effect, the feeling and mood would change if the light were positioned differently.

Edwin Reinhardt





Line, shape, value and texture...

When you set out to explore one of these, you inevitably become involved with all four — as you've surely learned from your own experiments. Even so, when a painting you're working on is giving you problems, don't forget that it helps to stop and examine each of these picture elements in turn — the shapes, the lines, the textures, the values.

If your explorations have given you a taste of the joy and surprise that come from searching, you've learned something you'll have for the rest of your life. Don't stop — ever. You don't need to feel that you should always be conscious of precisely what it is you're after or what the end result will be. The act of creating a piece of art is mysterious; it can't really be explained. Part of it occurs in the subconscious. Let it happen that way. Don't set yourself a rigid course to follow. If you always knew exactly what your picture would look like at the end, what would be the point of going through the motions of painting it? Let ideas build from each other, and welcome the unexpected ones. They may be the best of all.



What's ahead?

Next you're going to have a look at some unlikely materials — lucite, aluminum, plexiglas, welded pieces of junk — which have become accepted components in works of art. You're going to try some methods, too, that may seem strange to you. Never in history has there been so much seeking for new ways of expression — a reflection of the restless, questioning time we live in. As great changes come, art speaks of them. Electronics, atomic energy, travel in space all have had their impact on art. If you are willing to accept these new artistic approaches, you will grow in your understanding of them, and in your development as an artist of your time.



Assignment

Section

15 Exploration— advanced picture-making

Important

These instructions are extremely important to you. Read them through carefully from start to finish. Do your assignment work only after you have done the experiments on pages 8 and 9, 10 and 11, 19, 22, and 27. Do not send these experiments to the School.

"Fear of making a mistake is the greatest mistake a painter can make." Doris Lee

To send to the School

Section 15 assignment work

This section explains how a picture can grow. An artist is seldom content with the first thought he puts down on his paper or canvas. He becomes an explorer, changing this or that, often starting all over again.

For this assignment we want you to explore an idea. Make a picture of any subject you wish. Then free your mind—look at what you've done from a fresh point of view. Do a series of variations and explorations as explained in the text. You may want to reverse values, break up the lines, emphasize textures—if you feel the urge to do something, try it. It may work, it may not, but you'll never find out if you don't try. At this time we are more interested in your exploration and problem solving than we are in how well you make finished pictures.

Work in any medium you wish—but stick to black, white, and grays.

Send in to the School your original picture and three of your exploration sketches. Number these drawings in the order in which you did them—1, 2, and 3. Your picture and your explorations should be no larger than 16 x 20 inches.

Print on the back of each piece of work:

Your name
Student number
Address
Assignment number

(over, please)

Cut along this line—and mail with your assignment

Section 15 Exploration— advanced picture-making

Comment sheet

In the space below, write a brief description of your picture and give us some thoughts on the explorations you have numbered.

1.

2.

3.

Name _____

Student number _____

Date _____

Check before mailing

Your assignment carton should contain:

- 1 picture of any subject in any black, white, and gray medium, no larger than 16 x 20 inches
- 3 variations or explorations of that picture, no larger than 16 x 20 inches
- 1 comment sheet (on other side of this page)
- 1 shipping label filled out completely with your name and address

Mail this carton to:

**Famous Artists School
Westport, Connecticut 06880**

Note: Be sure your work is thoroughly dry before mailing.